

The odd looking settlement took form as they approached it. A ring of thorn trees stood along the perimeter of a group of mud and stone buildings. The twenty-foot thorn trees, and it was difficult to differentiate between individual ones, provided an effective defence. The multiple trunks of the individual trees overlapped each other made a dangerous barrier for any large creature to cross. Behind the trees stood a wall, eight feet high made of clay bricks, stone and mud. The only entrance was through a set of large wooden doors located in the middle of the thorn trees, standing ten feet high and a dozen feet wide. In front of the doors stood a pair of stone towers, one shorter than the other due to its top crumbling down. The doors were falling down under their own weight, helped along by the intrusion of the thorn trees. The rotting wood had split wide enough that Malcolm and the others could slip through. The inside of the compound surprised them.

The walls were thick, almost two feet, but they hadn't been able to stop an attack from penetrating.

Many of the buildings had fallen down. The mud and stone had collapsed from the elements in some cases, but others appeared to have been knocked down by something long ago with their walls scattered about in chunks. Among the debris were broken clay pots, wood pieces and bones. Beyond the buildings, the rear of the settlement was open to the ocean with large rocks positioned along the shore to discourage easy access.

Malcolm looked around. It was difficult to take more than a few steps before coming across a skeleton. He looked at the white bones and quickly concluded they belonged to more than one type of creature.

"What do you think Malcolm? What happened here?" Rog bent down to examine a skull. "Is this skull human?"

"A battle, I would hazard a guess." He pointed at a nearby skeleton. "Broken spear in the ribs of that creature. As far as that skull is concerned, I guess it might be human but different from us." Malcolm wandered into one of the small buildings that was still standing. Although the roof had disappeared, the walls stood with an opening for a door and a small window. Inside he found more human skeletons, including that of an infant without its head. He winced at the obvious violence. Malcolm heard Rog calling him and he went to where the younger man was pointing at yet another skeleton, this one dominated by a large head that had three horns attached to it.

"What the hell is this thing, Malcolm?"

Malcolm looked at the size of the four-legged creature that was half the size of one of the elephant creatures. "Haven't a clue to be truthful."

A voice came from behind him. "It's a triceratops. They lived on Earth at one time and died out, like the raptors."

Malcolm didn't turn around, standing in awe at the huge array of bones. "Doesn't look like they died here, Carl. God almighty that's a fierce looking animal."

"Uh, actually a plant eater. There's a few more by those thorn trees, a couple are actually among the tree trunks. Those skulls of the people, they look human but I think they were of a species that died out. Maybe Neanderthal, maybe something in between."

"You mean these aren't human?"

"Human but a little different than us. I'm going to check with Tanya, maybe she can get a read on this."

Malcolm watched him walk away with his new companion. Chester, he recalled, as Carl had decided to call her.

Tanya walked among the ruins and the bones and then stood looking at the ocean. A twelve-foot boat lay disintegrated on the shore, the timbers a dark grey on the ground. Large rocks could be seen on both the beach and the shallow water. The scene looked peaceful to her and she realized that because of the lack of bones, it probably wasn't the area where the battle took place. With a sigh she turned back to the main site, glad Katrina had stopped following her around. Forgiving was one thing, being buddies with her was quite another.

Rog came running up to her. "Hey witch, Carl's looking for you."

She pointed her finger at him. "One of these days I'm going to put a curse on you for calling me that."

"Wouldn't that just prove that you're really a witch then?"

She laughed. "Jerk. Maybe I'll just beat you up then."

He fainted a defensive position. "Hey, I heard Carl's got a new lady friend. You waited too long to make your move."

For a moment she felt irrationally jealous, and then she suddenly understood his jibe. Tanya hoped her face didn't show it. "Oh, yeah, his pet. What did he call her? Chester." She shook her head. "That animal never had it so good, free food and a fire to sleep by every night."

"You could've had all that, if you been nicer."

"Sleep by the fire like an animal?" She started to chase him but he sprinted out of her reach. "One of these days I'm going to teach you a lesson."

They found Carl looking at some of the bones lying around. He picked up the skull of a raptor, turning it over in his hands.

“Hey, Carl, look who I found hanging around the beach while the rest of us were working.”

Carl wiped his hands as he smiled at Rog’s joke. Tanya tried to look exasperated at the slight but was amused. Since leaving Sorbit she had established friendships of sorts with Malcolm, Rog, and Hilliard and an odd relationship with Katrina, who was now trying to be her friend. Then there was Carl—Carl who was tempting her to abandon her commitment to be a Witchdoctor.

“Tanya, I was wondering if you could use your talents to determine what happened here? Do your Aura thing.”

“Aura thing? It’s a little more than just that.” She looked around. “Sure, I’ll give it a try.”

Tanya searched for a quiet spot and found several near the ocean, but didn’t like the feel of the area. She walked along the beach and found a secluded spot on a rise that overlooked the ocean. This was going to be difficult for her. Trying to read the far past was not easy and she had taken one of the bones with her to aid her search. She tried to get as comfortable as possible, taking off her sandals and loosening her skirt and top. Her best contact with the Aura occurred when she exposed herself as much as possible to the outside, and while she didn’t dare undress with the potential of someone seeing her, she tried to give herself the illusion of being naked. She started her chant, quickly finding the rhythm that allowed her mind to reach the trance state where she felt herself disappear from her physical self. The Aura came strong and fast this time, much stronger than it had before and for the barest of moments, she almost withdrew from its space, feeling almost overwhelmed by its strength. She pictured herself falling upward and allowed the Aura to take control.

It never had close to this power before and it made her a bit nervous. She heard her own voice telling herself to relax though her own lips didn’t move.

Suddenly, she found herself in the middle of the settlement, the image soft as if she was looking through a fog. She knew instinctively where each person was, and when she watched Carl talk to Malcolm, his voice became clear as if she was next to him. What was interesting she found she had an image of everything around her, as if she had suddenly developed 360-degree peripheral vision. When she used to call on the Aura in the past, the best she could see were smoky, shadow images on a grey slate.

She tried to contain her excitement at her new powers for fear she would slip out of the trance state. She felt the bone in her hand, concentrating on its shape and then its being. The images of Carl and others began to fade, to be replaced by the ghostly images of events long ago.

She found it confusing to sort out the various images at first, but then she concentrated on a thread of energy that twisted its way out of the settlement. She felt herself moving in both time and place, to the start of the battle.

She ran next to a thunderous herd of triceratops, the thousand hoofs churning up small trees, grasses and soil in a cloud of dust. The smell of fear and excitement stimulated her, causing her to cry out. She looked at the long spear she was using to poke at one of the beasts, to keep him charging at full speed regardless of what lay ahead. In her mind she could feel the need for revenge, for the death of their young and strong alike. A raptor ran past her, banishing a spear as well and its scream mixed with the bleating of the triceratops. She knew that over three hundred like her were chasing the creatures towards the settlement. Once again, the stone towers were an effective deterrent to the triceratops. The towers did not offer enough space between to squeeze through and caused them to veer away from the doors. But this time the triceratops were sent towards the thorn trees and a rumbling storm of yellow and brown crashed into the green perimeter. The first few triceratops died, impaled by the pointed branches and then trampled by those behind them. Soon a path was made through the trees to the brick and stonewalls before they collapsed under the weight of the three-horned dinosaurs. They did more damage inside the compound, trampling people and buildings alike as they panicked.

Tanya's ghostly raptor leaped among the stalled triceratops, as they were no longer being driven into the thorn trees. She and her comrades poured into the opening screaming the death-kill at the humans, the smell of blood and fear sending the raptors into a near frenzy.

Tanya saw her raptor plunge a spear into a woman's back. Around her several raptors fell to arrows, another took a spear in his throat. The raptors, almost two feet shorter than the six-foot humans, continued to flood in.

A raptor used her spear and then a claw on her foot to maim and then rip open a human. The humans were in disarray from the triceratops trying to escape and the assault from the raptors.

More raptors died from the cornered humans but they continued to be attacked from the combined clans of the raptors. Some humans died as they tried to open the heavy front doors but they weren't quick enough to allow escape.

A few lucky ones managed to escape in a boat, leaving the raptors howling in anger. The raptors could not swim and did not like to venture even into shallow water.

Suddenly, Tanya saw a face of a human up close. His eyes full of fear and rage and then the image became dull as the raptor that carried her spirit fell to the ground dying. A moment later she found herself back in the middle of the settlement but in her own time. She drew back on herself and emerged from the Aura, trembling, sweating and exhausted.

Tanya rested an hour before she walked back to the centre of the settlement. She walked around until she came to the spot she last remembered seeing through the raptor's eyes, spotting a white bone poking above the ground. A few minutes later, she dug into the sandy soil and came across the remainder of the skeleton. A broken rib showed where the blow entered to kill it. For a moment, she paused to briefly touch the skull and then replaced the bone she had taken from the area earlier. She stood up and found Carl, standing near Malcolm.

Tanya related her vision to them, without telling them that she felt she was there at the actual battle.

“So these raptors killed these people out of revenge?” Carl had listened carefully and now tried to figure out what made the raptors work together so effectively.

“I guess so, at least they thought the people were killing them. Some got away by boats, but not very many.”

“It looks like we're dealing with intelligent raptors. What about the people, did they look like us?”

“Somewhat. Bigger, heavier anyway. Ugly faces, though compared to the raptors they were at least human. Those raptors were small, only about this high.” She held her hand about four feet off the ground.

“But their skulls are large for their size, maybe they have bigger brains. I hope we don't come across them.”

Malcolm had been listening but until now hadn't joined in the discussion. “Any image of where they might live now?”

“No, I didn't try. I could go back to the Aura and see if I can find out.”

Carl shook his head. “No, you look pretty beat. You said clans had joined together so we can assume they would be in more than one place anyhow. We're going to hold up here for a couple of days. I've got a couple of people cleaning out an area so we can

camp here. We'll secure the door and maybe try to relax for a change. You..." he pointed at Tanya, "...should get some rest."

"Is that an order?" She heard herself speak in a tired voice and wasn't sure if her reply sounded challenging or as a tease. It didn't really matter, she knew she had to sleep.

"Yeah, do you want me to tuck you in?"

She decided not to dignify his question with a reply, rolling her eyes upward and then walking away. She heard Malcolm laugh and say something to Carl but by then she was no longer paying attention.

Tanya woke up in one of the few remaining buildings. She had wrapped a blanket around herself and curled up in a corner. She expected to have vivid dreams but instead opened her eyes to dancing shadows on a wall. Her only memories were of curling up to the wall to rest. The shadows were from the fire that lighted up the open doorway. She yawned and went out to where people were mulling around the fire. She wondered how much different the scene was a hundred years ago when the odd looking humans lived here.